

## SYSTEM, STRUCTURE AND CONTRADICTION IN *DAS KAPITAL*\*

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Is it possible to analyse the relationship between an event and a structure, or to account for the origin and development of a structure, without being forced to abandon a structuralist point of view? These are two questions which are forcing themselves more and more on our attention, and some writers have already thought it possible to give an affirmative answer. One aspect of the recent interest in structuralism has been the revival of the dialogue between structuralism and Marxism. This will hardly seem surprising when it is remembered that over a century ago Marx was describing the whole of social life in terms of 'structures', differentiating different types of society on the basis of his hypothesis of the existence of necessary 'correspondances' between infrastructures and superstructures, and was claiming to be able to account for the evolution of different types of society by the appearance and growth of internal 'contradictions' between their structures.

It might seem, when one remembers the dialectic 'miracles' of Hegel and of certain Marxists, that with the appearance of the word 'contradiction' the structuralist-Marxist dialogue was doomed to be very short-lived. But is the matter to be so summarily dismissed? Is the Marxist dialectic the dialectic of Hegel? Marx himself is somewhat equivocal on this point when he says that Hegel's dialectic only needed to be 'put back on its feet' for it to lose all the mystification with which Hegelian idealism had encumbered it, and become a useful scientific instrument.

We have found it useful, in re-examining the problem, to take another look at the text of *Das Kapital* itself, and we hope to be able to demonstrate that, in its fundamental principles, Marx's dialectic has nothing at all in common with that of Hegel, because they are in fact referring to two quite different notions of contradiction. The traditional analysis of Marx's work is seen to be hopelessly wrong and in its place there emerges

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a Marx who is largely unfamiliar to the average Marxist but who is capable of providing us with many unexpected and fruitful aids to the adoption of a scientific approach of the most modern kind.

### I

#### FROM THE VISIBLE WORKING OF THE CAPITALIST SYSTEM TO ITS HIDDEN INTERNAL 'STRUCTURE'

Science would be superfluous if there were no difference between the appearance of things and their essence (Karl Marx, *Das Kapital*, book III, vol. m).

What does Marx mean by an economic 'system'? He means a certain combination of specific modes of production, distribution, sharing out and consumption of material goods. In this combination the mode of production of the goods plays the most important role. A mode of production is the combination of two mutually irreducible structures. They are, on the one hand, the productive forces and, on the other, the relationships of production. The notion of productive forces includes all the factors of production, including resources, equipment and men, which are to be found in a specific society at a specific time, and which must be combined in a specific way to produce the material goods which that society needs. The notion of relationships of production covers the functions fulfilled by individuals and groups in the process of production and in the control of the factors of production. The capitalist relationships of production, for example, are the relationships between a class of individuals who possess as their own private property the productive forces and the capital, and a class of individuals who possess neither of these and who must sell to the former class the use of their labour in exchange for a wage. Each class is complementary to the other and presupposes the existence of the other.

For Marx, a scientific investigation of the capitalist system consists in discovering the hidden internal structure beneath its visible functioning.

For Marx therefore, as for Claude Lévi-Strauss,<sup>1</sup> the structures are not to be confused with the visible social relationships. They constitute a *level of reality* which is invisible, but which is none the less present beneath the visible social relationships. The logic of these relationships, and, at a more general level, the laws of social practice derive from the operation

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of these hidden structures, and their discovery should enable us to account for all the observable facts.<sup>2</sup>

It will be helpful to consider a very brief summary of Marx's thesis. In the day-to-day working of the capitalist system everything conspires to make it *appear* as if the wages a worker received paid for his labour, and as if capital possessed the property of increasing of its own accord, providing its owner with a profit. In the day-to-day working of the system there is no *immediate* proof that the capitalist's profit represents unpaid labour provided by the worker. There is no *direct experience* of the exploitation of the worker by the capitalist.

For Marx the profit is a part of the exchange-value of the goods produced which is retained by the entrepreneur after deduction of the cost of production. The notion of an exchange-value of the goods presupposes the existence of some common unit of measure. This common measure cannot be the utility of the goods. There is clearly nothing in common between the utility of, for example, a cabbage and a fountain-pen ... The exchange-value of goods can only be based on their having in common the fact of being the product of labour. The substance of the value is therefore the work, the labour socially necessary for the production of the goods. The profit is that part of the value which is created through the use of the worker's labour but which is not paid for in the wages.<sup>3</sup> Profit is therefore unpaid work. But, in practice, both the capitalist and the worker have the impression that the wages pay for all the work done by the worker (wages here are taken to include bonuses, piece-work payments, overtime payments, etc.). So the payment of wages gives the unpaid work of the worker the appearance of being paid work:

This form of wage, which is merely an expression of the false, visible appearance of paid labour, renders *invisible* the *real* relationship between capital and labour and gives an *impression* which is in fact the opposite of the truth; it is from these false appearances that all the legal notions of the wage-earner and the capitalist are derived, as are all the myths which surround capitalistic production.<sup>4</sup>

As soon as wages are thought of as the 'price' of labour, profit can no longer be seen as unpaid labour. It is necessarily seen as being produced by capital. Each side seems to be drawing from production the revenue to which it is entitled. There is no visible exploitation of one class by the other. The economic categories of wages, profits, interest, etc., express therefore the visible relations of the day-to-day practice of affairs, and as

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such they do have some *practical* use for us, but they are of no scientific value whatever. Any so-called economics based on these categories is no more than a 'systemization of the claims and pretensions of agents of production who are themselves prisoners of bourgeois relationships of production and merely constitutes an apology of these ideas ... it is therefore hardly surprising that popular notions of economics appear perfectly self-evident and that the relationships seem the more obvious for their internal structure remaining hidden'.<sup>5</sup> The appearance of intelligibility and coherence bestowed by this systemization of the way members of society normally see the system inevitably gives rise to a number of myths. 'To speak of the "price" of labour is as irrational as to speak of a yellow logarithm.' The myth here consists of a coherent theory of appearances, of what *seems* to be taking place in practice. It is clear then that a scientific description of the social reality cannot be based on the impressions which individuals have of it, even when these are the result of serious reflection. It is in fact the task of such a scientific description to show that these impressions *are* an illusion and to reveal the hidden internal logic of the life of the society. For Marx, then, the scientific model corresponds to a reality which is hidden beneath the visible reality. He in fact goes further, because for him this concealment is not due to the inability of the conscious mind to perceive the structure. It is implicit in the structure itself. If capital is not a thing but a social relationship, that is, an intangible reality, it must necessarily disappear from view when presented under the tangible forms of raw materials, equipment, money, etc. So it is not exactly the case that the individual is mistaken. It is rather that the reality is inaccessible to him. His impressions are based on the appearances beneath which the structure of the capitalist production process conceals itself. For Marx, to each real structure there corresponds a mode of appearance of this structure and this mode of appearance is the basis of a sort of spontaneous awareness of the structure for which neither the conscious mind nor the individual is responsible. Thus it is that a scientific description of the structure cannot ignore this spontaneous awareness of the structure. It will change the role of this spontaneous awareness and modify its effects on the behaviour of the individuals, but it will not eliminate it.<sup>6</sup>

Marx, then, in posing that the structure is not to be confused with the visible relationships, but that it explains their hidden logic, is clearly a forerunner of the modern structuralist movement. He can be most closely identified with this movement when he insists on the priority of

the study of the structure over that of its origin and development. But before going on to talk about this let us compare the scientific practice of Lévi-Strauss to that of Marx by recalling the main features of the famous analysis of the kinship system of the Murngin tribe to be found in *Les Structures élémentaires de la parenté*.<sup>7</sup>

The kinship system of this Australian tribe used to be considered by the specialists to be 'abnormal' because they were unable to classify it in the typology of the so-called 'classical' Australian systems. These could be divided into three types, according to whether they contained two, four or eight matrimonial classes. It was observed that, in a two-class system, marriage was allowed between cross cousins but forbidden between parallel cousins. The same applied to the four-class Kariëra system. Thus there was no difference between a two-class and a four-class system as far as the authorization or prohibition of marriage was concerned. In the Aranda system, however, which had eight subclasses, marriage between all first cousins, whether cross or parallel, was forbidden.

The Murngin system differs from both the Kariëra and the Aranda systems. It contains eight subclasses like the Aranda system, yet it permits marriage with a matrilineal female cross cousin like the Kariëra system. But, whereas the Kariëra system permits marriage with both matrilineal and patrilineal female cross cousins, the Murngin system prohibits it with the patrilineal female cross cousin, thus introducing a dichotomy between matrilineal and patrilineal cross cousins. There are other peculiarities in the Murngin system. It recognizes seven genealogical lines of descent whereas the Aranda system makes do with four and the Kariëra system with two; there are seventy-one different terms in its kinship nomenclature whereas the Aranda system has only forty-one and the Kariëra system twenty-one.

An explanation was needed, then, to account for the dichotomy between cross cousins, the preference shown for marriage with a matrilineal female cross cousin, and also for the other peculiarities of the system. Lévi-Strauss has demonstrated that it is possible to account for all of these by supposing the existence and functioning beneath the *explicit* system of restricted exchange between eight subclasses, which is the *appearance* of the Murngin system, of an *implicit* four-class system of a totally different structure, of which even the Murngin themselves are unaware, and which ethnologists specializing in the field had not yet identified. Lévi-Strauss calls this a 'generalized exchange structure'.

Whereas in a restricted exchange system the rule for marriage is always symmetrical (that is, if a man from A marries a woman from B, a man from B can marry a woman from A) in a generalized exchange system if a man from A marries a woman from B, a man from B will marry a woman from C and a man from C a woman from A. A will therefore take a woman from B but will give up 'in exchange' a woman to C. Reciprocity in this case involves a certain number of partners and takes the form of the interplay of relationships in one particular and irreversible direction:  $A \rightarrow B \rightarrow C \rightarrow A$ . It can therefore be shown that in a four-class generalized exchange system the matrilineal female cross cousin is always in the class immediately following that of Ego, that is, the class into which he can marry, whereas the patrilineal female cross cousin is always in the preceding class, with whom marriage is therefore forbidden. The structure of such a system thus provides the theoretical formula for Murngin marriage rules and accounts for the law of the dichotomy of cross cousins.

It can then be easily demonstrated that if to a four-class generalized exchange system is added a matrilineal binary system, each class will be divided into two subclasses and the result is a system with eight subclasses which has the appearance of being a doubled-up restricted exchange system of the Aranda type. It is now easy to explain all the other peculiarities of the system such as the number of genealogical lines of descent, and the size of the nomenclature, which are seen as necessary consequences of the working of this implicit structure, as complementary facets of its internal logic.

It is not difficult to see the immense importance of Lévi-Strauss's demonstration. In seeking to account for a particular case which appeared to be abnormal and was unclassifiable in the traditional ethnological typology,<sup>8</sup> Lévi-Strauss had discovered the existence<sup>9</sup> and had accounted for the nature of a new family of structures, which were far more complex than those then known and far more difficult to identify because the cycle of exchanges which they determined was less immediately perceptible. A new classification of kinship systems became both necessary and possible, and into it was integrated the old typology of restricted exchange systems, the particularity of which was now obvious. At the practical level a new tool was made available which was to prove indispensable in the study of certain complex kinship systems in China, India, South-East Asia and Siberia which appeared to make no use of the notion of exchange.

Lévi-Strauss's methodological principles and conclusions are of no less importance epistemologically. Whether a structure is implicit,<sup>10</sup> as in the Murngin case, or explicit, as with the Kachin, it is never directly visible and accessible at the empirical level but has to be discovered through theoretical research, which will involve the setting up of hypotheses and models. In its very principle then Lévi-Strauss's structural analysis rejects the structural functionalism of Radcliffe-Brown,<sup>11</sup> and in general the whole of British and American empirical sociology in which the structure is seen as part of empirical reality.<sup>12</sup>

For Lévi-Strauss too, the structure is part of reality, but not part of empirical reality. One must not therefore try to equate the structure and the theoretical model set up to represent it. The structure does *not* exist only in and through the human mind, and this excludes the idealist and formalist structuralism which claims to be based on Lévi-Strauss's ideas.<sup>13</sup> His position is stated, far more explicitly than in *Anthropologie structurale*, in his reply to Maybury-Lewis, who had accused him of discovering pseudo-structures which were contradicted by the ethnographical facts:

Of course only experiment can provide the final answer. But experiment which is suggested and guided by deductive reasoning will not be the same as the simple experiments with which the whole process began. The ultimate proof of the molecular structure of matter is provided by the electron microscope which enables us to see the actual molecules. But this does not alter the fact that in the future the molecule will have become no more visible to the naked eye than it was in the past. In the same way, one cannot hope to expect structural analysis to change the perception of the concrete social relationships. But it will account for them more satisfactorily.<sup>14</sup>

A subsidiary consequence of the structural method is the rejection of any form of psychologism or sociological finalism. From as early as his *Les Structures élémentaires de la parenté*, Lévi-Strauss has shown that the psychological approach of Warner provided only the illusion of an answer to the problem of the seven genealogical lines of descent of the Murngin tribe.<sup>15</sup> Warner's explanation was based on a supposed need to resolve the tensions which, without this large number of lines of descent, would arise in the group between Ego and the brother of the mother, that is, the father of the matrilineal female cross cousin, and therefore the potential future wife.<sup>16</sup> As we have seen, the real answer owes nothing to psychology but is found quite simply in the logic of the

generalized exchange system, the existence of which Warner did not even suspect.

More fundamentally the analysis of the logic of a structure throws light on its potentialities and its capacity for evolution. Research into the origin and first appearance of a structure is, so to speak, guided by a proper knowledge of how that structure now works. In the case of the Murngin, Lévi-Strauss supposed that they had borrowed from elsewhere a system with eight subclasses which they had grafted on to their original matrimonial system.<sup>17</sup> He then showed that such a system would be unstable and that this would determine what form and types of evolution were possible. He showed that this instability was common to all generalized exchange systems, which are always 'harmonic' since the rules of filiation are the same as the rules of residence for determining the social status of an individual, whereas restricted exchange systems are always 'disharmonic and stable'.<sup>18</sup> He concluded that this was the basic reason for the unequal frequency of occurrence and capacity for evolution of the two families of structures.<sup>19</sup> These capacities therefore are the objective properties of the structures, which do not depend on the individual members of the society and of which the individual is, for the most part, unconscious. For example, if the Murngin system is the product of borrowing and an adaptation, it is to that extent the product of a conscious and deliberate act, but for the most part the Murngin remained unconscious of the logic of their new system and its capacity for evolution, and in any case these were not determined by their intentions. Seen in this perspective, social evolution ceases to be a series of meaningless accidents.<sup>20</sup>

This all-too-brief analysis of a fragment of one of the earliest works of Lévi-Strauss will none the less be sufficient to establish the validity of the comparison between Marx and modern structuralism. From it emerge two important principles of structural analysis as exemplified in the Lévi-Strauss approach: the first is that a structure is part of reality but not of visible relationships, the second is that the study of the internal functioning of a structure must precede and will throw light on the study of its coming into being and subsequent evolution. We have already shown that the first of these principles is to be found in Marx's work. We shall now show that it is impossible to understand the architecture of *Das Kapital* without the use of the second.



II

PRIORITY OF THE STUDY OF THE STRUCTURE  
ITSELF OVER THAT OF ITS ORIGIN AND SUBSEQUENT  
EVOLUTION

That this priority is observed in *Das Kapital* can easily be seen from a quick glance at its architecture. The work begins not with the theory of Capital, but with an exposition of the theory of Value, that is, with the definition of a number of categories necessary for the study of any system of mercantile production, whether based on the labour of a free peasant, a slave, a serf, or a wage-earning worker. This group of categories is developed from a definition of the exchange value of merchandise. Money next appears, as a special sort of merchandise, whose function is to express the exchange-value of other merchandise. Money ceases to be a simple means of exchange and begins to function as capital when it begins to earn money, when its initial value can be increased through its use. The general definition of capital whatever its form, whether commercial, financial or industrial capital, is that it is a value which can be put to use and thereby earns surplus value.

By the end of the second section of Volume I of *Das Kapital*, Marx has equipped himself with the theoretical instruments necessary to identify the specific structure of the capitalistic economic system and the relationship between capital and paid labour, and to set up the theory of capital. Before he could begin to elaborate this theory he needed the most precise definition of the notion of merchandise, since in the capital-labour relationship labour is seen as a merchandise. The analysis of the internal structure of the capitalist system then becomes possible, that is, the study of the mechanism of the production of surplus value through the capital-labour relationship. Book I contains a lengthy analysis of the two forms of surplus value: absolute surplus value (which is obtained by an increase in working hours without a corresponding increase in wages) and relative surplus value (which is obtained by a decrease in the cost of upkeep of the worker brought about by an increase in the productivity of labour in those branches of industry which produce the means of subsistence for the worker and his family).

It is not until the end of Book I that Marx approaches the problem of the origin of the relationships of production in the capitalist system through a discussion of what classical economists called 'the problem of

primary Accumulation'. Marx then proceeds in a way which constitutes a complete break with the historicist approach. The study of the genesis of a structure can only be undertaken when it can be guided by a thorough and previously acquired knowledge of that structure. The study of the genesis of the specific structure of the capitalist system involves the identification of the particular historical circumstances in which individuals emerged who were free in their person but who were without means of production or money, and who were therefore forced to sell their labour to other individuals who were in possession of means of production and money, but who were forced to buy the labour of others in order to set these means of production to work and to set their money to earn profit. But Marx gives no more than a brief sketch of this in the course of a rapid summary of some of the conditions, forms and stages of the appearance of capitalism in Europe. He does not really give us a history of capitalism. Of these different stages we might note the disbandment of feudal retinues in England, the expropriation and partial expulsion of the peasants, the 'enclosure' movement, the transformation of merchants into merchant-manufacturers, colonial trade, and the development of protectionism. All these phenomena occurred in Portugal, Spain, Holland, France and England in the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries and in general resulted in the appearance of a large number of producers without the means of production and of their use in a new structure of production.

... At the heart of the capitalist system, therefore, is the fundamental separation of the producer from the means of production. This separation reproduces itself, becoming more and more marked once the capitalist system has properly established itself. But since it is at the basis of the system, the system could not be established before it came into existence. Before the system could come into existence, therefore, the means of production must, partially at least, already have been wrested from the producers who had previously used them to carry out their own work, and been concentrated in the hands of the merchant-manufacturers who used them for the very different purpose of speculating on the work of others. The historical movement which had brought about the divorce of work done from its external conditions – this then is the ultimate origin of 'primary' accumulation, so-called because it belongs to a pre-historic age as far as the bourgeois world is concerned. The economic structure of

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capitalism emerged from the very substance of the economic structure of feudalism. The dissolution of one system threw up the constituent elements of the other.<sup>21</sup>

The analysis of the birth of a new structure, then, means the analysis of the historical conditions which surrounded the appearance of its internal elements, and the relationships which grew up between them. Economic history therefore rests on the prior identification of these elements and their relationships, that is, on the prior elaboration of economic theory. In Marx's text the dissolution of one system and the birth of another are described at the same time and both are seen as being due to the same process: the development of internal contradictions in the old system (for which a theory must also be set up).

It might seem that the validity of this general approach, which proceeds from the identification of the structure to the study of its origin, is jeopardized by an obstacle which Marx himself set up. For how can the hypothesis of the appearance of internal contradictions in a system be reconciled with the thesis that the working of the system necessarily reproduces the conditions under which it continues to work? For example, the working of the capitalist system constantly reproduces the capital-labour relationship upon which it is constructed. The working of the mechanisms of profits and wages constantly enables the capitalist class to accumulate new capital and to maintain itself in its position as the dominant class, while at the same time it forces the working class constantly to offer its labour for sale and thus to maintain itself in its position as the dominated class.<sup>22</sup> The capital-labour relationship, then, is seen as the element of the economic structure of capitalism which remains constant whatever other variations may occur, such as the movement away from free-enterprise capitalism towards private- or state-monopoly capitalism, the appearance of new productive forces, changes in the composition of the working class or in the pattern of its trade-union or its political organization, etc. The discovery and definition of this constant factor therefore constitutes the essential starting-point of any scientific study of the system, and of its birth and evolution. This evolution is now seen as the study of those variations which are compatible with the reproduction of the constant factor in the structure of the system. Again at this level the question of a shift from political economics to economic history arises. As well as synchronic analysis, diachronic analysis becomes possible (that is, the analysis of various states of a

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structure, corresponding to various moments in its evolution). But the diachronic analysis of those variations compatible with the reproduction of a constant relationship will not show up any structural incompatibility, or any condition likely to provoke structural change.<sup>23</sup>

But might it not be possible for incompatible variations to occur *within the functioning* of the system (since the very survival of the system would prove that they were not incompatible with its reproduction)? Before entering on a detailed analysis of the notion of contradiction in Marx, let us examine a little more closely the notion of 'structural compatibility', for it plays a capital and twofold role, an understanding of which will clarify the fundamental method and layout of *Das Kapital*. It enables Marx to account for the visible forms of the working of the capitalist system which he rejected at the beginning of the work. It also enables him to explain the new role and the new forms assumed by the 'antediluvian' forms of capital<sup>24</sup> (commercial capital and financial capital), when they function in the framework of modern capitalism. We shall briefly summarize these two points in order to draw out the methodological consequences. Marx, as we have seen, began by analysing the mechanism of the production of surplus value and he showed that it consisted of production provided by unpaid labour. He then shows how the internal and necessary connection between surplus value and labour disappears as soon as it is related not to the wages paid to the worker, but to the whole of the capital put forward by the capitalist – disappears, that is, as soon as the surplus value is seen as profit. The results of Book II enable him, in Volume I of Book III, to analyse the complex conditions necessary for the realization of maximum profit by the capitalist entrepreneur. For our present purposes we can safely leave aside the price-value and price-profit relationships, average profit and excess profit, the levels of profit in different branches of the national economy, etc. The essential point is Marx's conclusion. The capitalist has to deduct from his profit, which finally seems to have very little to do with the real exploitation of his own workers, a portion which is paid as ground rent to the owner of the factory site, another portion which he pays out as interest to a money-lender or to a bank, and another portion which he must pay to the state as taxes. The remainder constitutes his business profit. In showing that the mechanism of the production of surplus value is the common origin of the visible forms of capitalistic profit, even though certain types of capitalists seem to have no direct connection with the process of production, Marx successfully analyses the articulation of the internal

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structure of the system to the visible forms which at the beginning of his work he had set aside for reasons of principle.

When Marx returns to these visible forms he in each case defines their real function in the system and their internal compatibility with the essential structures already studied. In more modern terms his approach would be to describe the ideal birth of the various elements of a system on the basis of its internal laws of composition. Marx defines it himself in relation to money.

There is one thing that everybody knows, even when he knows nothing else, and that is that merchandise can assume a particular value-form which contrasts in the most striking fashion with its natural forms: and this form is money. We must now do what the bourgeois economy has never tried to do: we must try to provide an explanation of the origin of the form money, that is to explain how the value contained in the relationship of value between different types of merchandise came to be expressed, from its simplest and least perceptible beginnings to this form – money – which is so striking to everyone. In doing this the enigma of money will be resolved once for all.<sup>25</sup>

We must first, however, clear up one misunderstanding which might arise over what we have called the ideal birth of economic categories. For although an object is classified as merchandise as soon as it is produced for exchange, this exchange in itself does not imply the existence of money, since it can be carried out by barter. For the exchange of merchandise to necessitate the specialization of one particular merchandise in the function of expressing and measuring the exchange-value of other types of merchandise (whether the special merchandise which fulfils this role be cocoa, shells, cattle or gold makes no difference to its function), certain precise conditions must exist. Other particular conditions must exist for the usual form of the means of exchange to be that of a precious metal. Marx then does not follow the Hegelian procedure of the deduction of one category from another. He first describes the functions of one element within a structure, or of one structure within a system, and explains the order of these functions. So there is no need to wait to discover where and how the first form of money was invented in order to resolve the 'enigma of money'. The object of economic theory is therefore to describe these functions and their order in any particular structure and thereby to define the categories of political

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economics and to relate them to each other in a sort of logical ideal genesis. But this genesis is not the real genesis and does not replace it. Once again economic theory points out the direction in which economic history should carry out its research, and itself uses the results of this research to make advances in its own field, the two subjects at all times retaining their separate identities. On this point Marx's rejection of any form of historical approach, or of any suggestion of an historical study of a system being given priority over its structural analysis, is total, and anticipates by more than half a century the radical rethinking in linguistics and sociology which led de Saussure and Lowie to reject the evolutionist approach of the nineteenth century.

One can understand capital independently of income from property. Capital is the economic force which dominates all others. We must therefore begin with it and end with it and it must be described and analysed before we describe and analyse the ownership of land. Once the two have been studied separately the relationship which exists between them must be studied. We cannot therefore range economic categories in the order of their historical importance. Their order must be determined by the relations which exist between them in modern bourgeois society, which is in fact exactly the opposite of what would seem to be their natural order, or the order in which they appeared in the historical evolution of the system. What is important is not the historical connection between economic relationships in the succession of different forms of society. Still less is it their order of succession 'in the mind' (Proudhon – a rather confused conception of the movement of history). What is important is their hierarchy in the framework of modern bourgeois society.<sup>26</sup>

This explains why the functioning of one structure must be compatible with the functioning of other structures in the same system. This also explains the place of the analysis of commercial capital and of financial capital in *Das Kapital*. For mercantile production is not an exclusive characteristic of modern capitalism. To the extent that exchange of merchandise existed in societies as different as, for example, those of the ancient oriental civilizations, the Greek and Roman slave societies, and the feudal societies of the Middle Ages, the functions of commerce and, to some extent, of credit must have existed. But in each case the forms and importance of these mercantile relationships changed. Marx shows for example that the very high rates of interest charged by money-lenders or

the immense profits of the international trade in merchandise which prevailed in many pre-capitalist societies were incompatible with the development of industrial capitalism, which brought about the development of new forms of credit and brought rates of interest down to a far lower level, thereby radically altering the proportion of the value of the merchandise earned by commercial or financial capital. 'The development of credit came about as a reaction against usury. But one must be careful not to misunderstand the significance of this development ... What it means is the subordination of interest – producing capital to the conditions and needs of the capitalistic mode of production, and nothing more.'<sup>27</sup>

Thus the appearance of new structures brings about a modification of the older structures and of their role and conditions of existence. So our analysis throws up the notion of a limit to the functional compatibility of different structures. We are thus back with the problem of the birth of new structures and the notion of contradiction in Marx.

Let us consider this well-known passage from the preface to the *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*:

The relationships of production correspond to a certain degree of development of the material productive forces. Together these various relationships of production constitute the economic structure of society, the concrete foundation on which is built the judicial and political superstructure and to which correspond certain forms of social consciousness ... the mode of physical production conditions the processes of social, political and intellectual life in general ... any change in the basic material economy will alter to a greater or lesser extent the whole enormous superstructure.<sup>28</sup>

The particular causality which Marx attributed to the economic factor in the overall interplay of all the interreacting causalities of the infrastructure and the superstructures has generally been misinterpreted. We have already seen that within any one infrastructure Marx distinguishes the relationships of production and the productive forces and that he never confuses the two. This irreducibility of the structures cannot apply to the economy alone, and we must remember that for Marx each social structure has its own content and mode of functioning and evolution. Recognition of this irreducibility immediately excludes two sorts of interpretation of the determining causality of the economy.

First, the non-economic structures cannot 'grow out of' the economic relationships and the 'causality of the economic factor' cannot be inter-

preted as 'the genesis of the superstructure from within the infrastructure'. Secondly, the non-economic structures are not simply 'phenomena' which accompany economic activity and which have only a passive role to play in social life, leaving the economic relationships alone with an active causality whose effects operate more or less automatically.<sup>29</sup> In either case it is difficult to see by what strange alchemy the economy could transform itself into, say, kinship relationships, or for what strange reason it should try to conceal itself, none too successfully at that, under the form of kinship relationships. The notion of a 'correspondance' between the structures then must be studied more closely, and its real meaning sought elsewhere.

Let us consider for example the process of production in our own capitalist society. The relationships of production between capitalist and worker, the obligation of the latter to work for the former, appear to be largely independent of any religious, political or even family links which might exist between them. Each social structure appears to be largely autonomous and the economist will tend to treat the non-economic structures as 'independent variables'. He will not look outside the economy in seeking to describe and explain it. The correspondence between structures therefore will be essentially 'external'. The situation may of course be different in a primitive society. For example, the Marxian economist will easily distinguish the productive forces of such a society (such as hunting, fishing, agriculture, etc.) but will not distinguish 'isolated' relationships of production. Or if he does he will distinguish them within the actual functioning of the relationships of kinship. These determine the rights of the individual in matters of the land and its products, his obligations to work for others, to receive and to give. They also determine the authority of certain individuals over others in society. Relationships of kinship dominate social life. How can we, from a Marxist point of view, reconcile the dominant role of kinship and the ultimately determining role of the economy?

This would seem to be impossible if the economy and kinship are seen as infrastructure and superstructure. But in a primitive society relationships of kinship function as relationships of production, just as they function as political relationships. Therefore the Marxist interpretation would be that relationships of kinship in this case are both infrastructure and superstructure.<sup>30</sup> And one may suppose that the complexity of kinship relationships in these primitive societies is proportional to the multiple functions which they have to assume.<sup>31</sup> One can also suppose that



the dominant role of a complex structure of kinship relationships in primitive societies is related to the general structure of productive forces, and to the low level of economic development which necessitates the co-operation of individuals in the form of a group-based society, for the survival of the individual and for the race as a whole.<sup>32</sup>

From this abstract example the economy-kinship correspondence can now be seen not as an external relationship but as an internal correspondence, although this does not mean that the economic relationship between individuals related by kinship is ever to be confused with their political or sexual relationships, for example. Thus, to the extent that in this type of society kinship actually functions as relationships of production, the determining role of the economy will be seen not to contradict the dominant role of kinship but simply to express itself through it.<sup>33</sup>

We might see in this a potential contribution of Marx's theory to the scientific study of social structures and of their many different types of evolution which would be radically different from any which his usual interpreters have granted or refused him. For what is irreducible in fact are the functions and evolution of the structures and their differentiation is to be explained by the transformation and evolution of their functions. It may be supposed, for example, that the appearance of new conditions of production in primitive societies will modify their demography, will require new forms of authority and will bring into being new relationships of production. It may be supposed that beyond a certain point the old relationships of kinship will not be able to fulfil the new functions. These will develop outside the kinship relationship and will call into being distinct social, political and religious structures which will take over from the kinship relationship and begin to function in their turn as relationships of production. So it would not be a question of the kinship relationships being transformed into political relationships but rather that the political function of the old kinship relationships would evolve on the basis of the new problems thrown up by a new situation. There would be a shift of the kinship relationships towards a new role. They would carry a different social weight and the political and religious relationships, having assumed new functions, and, being both infra-structure and superstructure, would move into the central position now left vacant.

Thus to explain the determining role of the economy would be at the same time to explain the dominant role of non-economic structures

in such-and-such a type of society, and societies distinct both in space and time can belong to the same type provided their overall structures are comparable, that is if the relationship between their social structures determined by the functions and importance of each of them was comparable. In this perspective, we can approach the familiar oppositions of structure-event (anthropology-history) and structure-individual (sociology-psychology) from a new angle.

An event, whether it originates from within a structure or from outside it, always affects the whole structure when it affects one of its elements. Between a cause and its ultimate effects there always lie the various known and unknown properties of one or more structures. This structural causality gives an event its full dimensions, whether or not they are understood, and explains its effects, whether or not they are intentional. We are therefore under no necessity to abandon the structuralist point of view. We do not need to come outside the structure to account for the event. When men by their acts create the conditions which bring about the appearance of new structures they in fact open up fields of objective possibilities of which they are largely unaware but which they discover through events, and whose limits they discover when the conditions in which these structures function change, with the result that the structures no longer play the same role and are thereby transformed. Thus behind the conscious rationality of the behaviour of the members of a society there always lies the more fundamental and unconscious rationality of the hierarchic structure of the social relationships which characterize that society. Rather than taking as our starting-point the individual and the hierarchy of his preferences and intentions, in order to explain the role and relationships of the structures of the society, we should in fact explain all the aspects of this role and relationship, including both those of which society is aware and those of which it is unaware, and seek in this hierarchy of structures the foundation of the hierarchy of 'values', that is, of the social norms of accepted behaviour. Then this hierarchy of values would account for the hierarchy of the needs of individuals playing particular roles and having particular status in society.

It is now seen to be impossible to challenge history with anthropology<sup>34</sup> or anthropology with history or to set up a sterile opposition between psychology and sociology, or sociology and history. Ultimately the possibility of developing the sciences of man depends on the possibility of discovering the laws governing the functioning, the evolution and the

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internal interacting correspondence of the social structures. One day these sciences of man will perhaps disprove Aristotle by also becoming sciences of the individual. The possibility of the development of these sciences of man thus depends on the structural method of analysis becoming widely used, once it has been developed sufficiently to describe the condition under which the structures and their functions change and evolve, the degree of acceptance and use of the structural method varying greatly at the present time from one field of study to another. We should hope that Marx's work, correctly interpreted, and uncluttered by that of his imitators, might help to hasten the process of acceptance.

## THE STRUCTURAL BALANCE OF THE KINSHIP SYSTEMS OF SOME PRIMITIVE PEOPLES

Peter Abell

In this note I want to argue that it may be theoretically enlightening to consider some elementary kinship structures from the point of view of the *theory of structural balance*. The note is based on the now famous essay by Lévi-Strauss entitled *Structural Analysis in Linguistics and in Anthropology*.<sup>1</sup>

This essay, as the title suggests, is designed to draw some interesting parallels between the problems of linguistic and anthropological analysis. In the course of his argument, Lévi-Strauss, in order to illustrate his basic methodology, uses some ethnographic data from various sources concerning the avunculate kinship relation among some primitive peoples. It is upon this part of his work that I shall concentrate.

I shall first outline the theory of structural balance and then introduce Lévi-Strauss's argument; this completed, balance theory will be applied to Lévi-Strauss's material, and finally some possible lines for future inquiry will be indicated.

### I. The Theory of Structural Balance

Only a very elementary introduction to the basic ideas of balance theory is given here. For a further account the reader is directed to my essay on 'Structural Balance in Dynamic Structures'.<sup>2</sup>

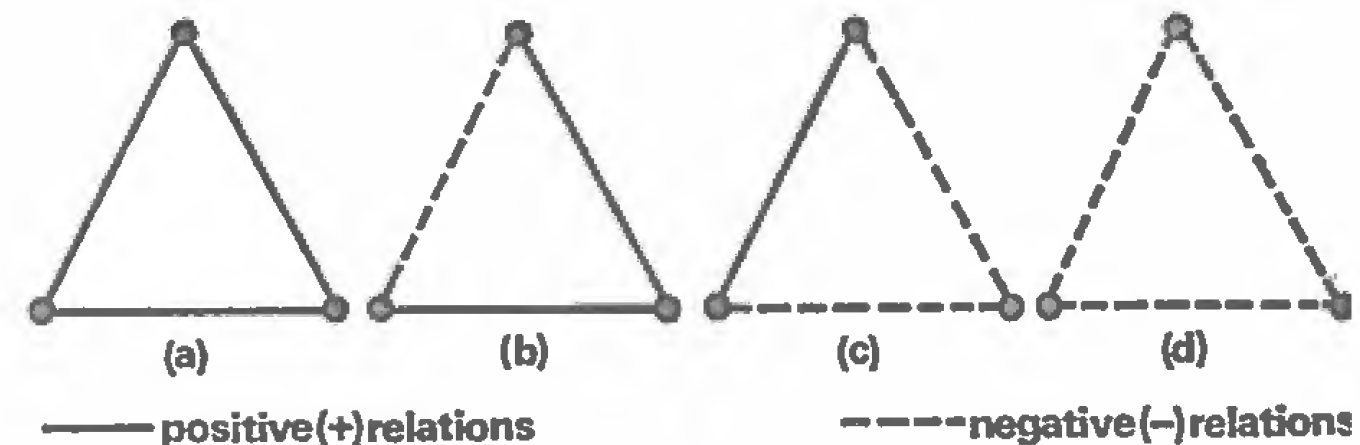


Fig. I

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insist that *Gammāhē* means *Gamarāla*'s wife. They infer from this that the *Gamarāla* was living in *binna* (uxorilocally). The logic of the story is that the *Gamarāla* = *Vira*, but the myth itself does not make this equation.

9. [The Peacock is the vehicle of Kataragama Deviyo (Skanda), the Ceylonese God of War, a deity whose cult is very ancient but certainly of Hindu origin. A virtuous Sinhalese Buddhist can gain almost as much merit by making a pilgrimage to the shrine of the Kataragama Deviyo as from ascending Adam's Peak to pay reverence to the Buddha's footprint. The cult of Kataragama is markedly phallic, whereas that of the Buddha is sexually ascetic (Editor).]

10. For example, according to the *Mahavamsa* xxii. 19, the monk of paragraph 2 was thrown into the sea instead of being boiled in oil.

11. Candala are reputedly the ancestors of the Rodiya, the lowest and most polluted of all present-day Sinhalese castes. Rodiya women are renowned for their beauty and for their professional activities as prostitutes.

12. The numbers in parentheses throughout this section indicate cross-references to the corresponding numbered incidents in the myth in section 11.

13. In the *Rajavaliya* version this opposition is quite explicit. 'Then the Kadol elephant being wroth thought within himself, "On my back was a woman, on the horse rode a man"' (*Rajavaliya*: 30).

14. In light of the importance of the roles played by Duthagāmani's mother and his elephant in the myth, it is interesting to note that the last time a Morapitiyan was severely possessed by a *yakkuva* (demon) was the day that the wife of the Koralemahatmaya died and the time before that was on the day that his elephant died. (The Koralemahatmaya is the headman of the Korale, an administrative unit composed of several villages; he was a Morapitiyan.)

15. The term *variga* (*varga*, *varige*, etc.) appears frequently in the sociological literature of Ceylon. The Seligmans, writing of the Veddas in 1911, interpret the word as meaning 'matrilinal clan'. Perera (1910), writing of Sinhalese, translates it as 'caste'. Leach (1961b), with reference to North Central Province Sinhalese material, translates it as 'sub-caste'. Leach (1963) has further pointed out that the Vedda 'clans' described by the Seligmans do not appear to have the characteristics of matrilineal descent groups and has suggested that the Seligmans misunderstood their evidence. However, with numerous qualifications, it might appear that the Vedda *varige* encountered by the Seligmans were in certain respects (a) matrilineal, (b) exogamous, (c) ranked. It should be noted that these are characteristics claimed for the Kotmale Valley *variga* also.

## SYSTEM, STRUCTURE AND CONTRADICTION IN DAS KAPITAL

1. C. Lévi-Strauss, 'La notion de structure en ethnologie', *Anthropologie structurale* (Plon Paris, 1958), ch. xv, p. 305.

2. Ibid., p. 306.

3. We have deliberately simplified the exposition. In fact the profit may or may not correspond to the surplus value actually produced by a firm.

4. Marx, *Das Kapital*, book I, vol. II.

5. Ibid., book III, vol. III.

6. Similarly for Spinoza the second, mathematical type of knowledge does not eliminate the first, everyday kind.

7. C. Lévi-Strauss, *Les Structures élémentaires de la parenté* (P.U.F., Paris, 1949), ch. XIV, pp. 216-46. See also A. Weil's algebraic study, ch. XIV, pp. 278-87.

8. This is similar to the results of the 'black body' radiation experiment - a 'small detail' (cf. Bachelard, *La Psychanalyse du Feu*) which upset the whole nineteenth-century Newtonian approach to physics.

This is not quite correct. Lévi-Strauss credits Hodson with the discovery of the correla-

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tion between the law of marriage with the matrilinear female cross cousin and the existence of a specific social structure. But Hodson believed that this structure must always be tripartite and patrilinear, whereas in fact it can contain any number of classes and need only be harmonic. See Lévi-Strauss, *Structures élémentaires*, pp. 292-3; T. C. Hodson, *Primitive Culture of India* (Royal Asiatic Society, London, 1922).

10. Its discovery was made all the more difficult in this case by the fact that the appearance of the system suggested a structure of the Aranda type but 'instead of the true symmetry of the Kariera and Aranda systems we find a pseudo-symmetry which turns out in fact to be two asymmetric structures superimposed' (*Structures élémentaires*, p. 242).

11. A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, *Structure and Function in Primitive Society* (Cohen & West, London, 1952).

12. See C. Lévi-Strauss, *On manipulated sociological models*, *Bijdragen* (1960).

13. Hence Lévi-Strauss's repeated criticisms of the idealism and formalism which have in fact become the main opponents of scientific structuralism, cf. 'La Structure et la forme' (*Cahiers de l'I.S.E.A.*, March, 1960), and the preface to *Le Cru et le cuit* (Plon, Paris, 1964).

14. Lévi-Strauss, *On manipulated sociological models*, p. 53.

15. Lévi-Strauss, *Structures élémentaires*, p. 235.

16. W. Lloyd Warner, 'Morphology and Function of the Australian Murngin type of Kinship', *American Anthropologist*, vol. 32-3, 1931, pp. 179-82.

17. Cases of borrowings of all or part of social institutions such as kinship, mythology, dance, etc., are quite common in Australia. Stanner was able to observe a case of the borrowing of the institution of kinship in the Nangiomeri tribe (see *Structures élémentaires*, p. 227).

18. The Kariera system, for example, is matrilinear and patrilocal.

19. 'This characteristic (that of being a harmonic regime) explains why the appearance of a class system is so rare whenever marriage is determined by a law of generalized exchange' (*Structures élémentaires*, p. 272).

20. Hence Lévi-Strauss's criticism of the associationist evolutionism of the nineteenth century (see *Structures élémentaires*, pp. 129, 185).

21. Marx, *Das Kapital*, book I, vol. III.

22. This is not invalidated by the phenomena of social mobility by which some workers may become capitalists or which are due to the effects of competition leading to the ruin of some capitalists or a particular category of business.

23. This diachrony always seems to resolve itself in the synchronic or at least to be only a manifestation of the many different modes of existence that the same structure can assume in different local conditions. Cf. Marx: 'The same economic base, the same that is in its fundamental conditions, can, under the effect of the large number of different empirical conditions, such as natural conditions, racial relationships, exterior historical influences etc., appear with an infinite number of variations which only the analysis of these empirical conditions will elucidate' (*Das Kapital*, book III, vol. III).

24. Marx, *Das Kapital*, book III, vol. II.

25. Ibid., book I, vol. I.

26. Karl Marx, *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow, 1961), p. 171.

27. Marx, *Das Kapital*, book III, vol. II.

28. Marx, *Contribution*, p. 28.

29. Engels: *Lettre à Starkenberg*, January 25th, 1894 (Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow, 1961).

30. Engels's declaration in *L'Origine de la famille de la propriété privée de l'État* (Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow, 1961, p. 15 of the preface) that 'The determining factor, in the final, historical, analysis, is the production and reproduction of day-to-day life' might lead one to suppose that kinship plays a determining role alongside the economy, whereas it is in fact, in this type of society, an element of the economic infra-structure.

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31. Because of this plurality of the function of kinship Beatty and other anthropologists have claimed that kinship has no content of its own but is simply a symbolic form through which the content of social life, economic, political, religious and other relationships is expressed, so that kinship is no more than a language or means of expression. Without denying that kinship does function as a symbolic language of social life Schneider objects to this that kinship also has a content of its own which can be discovered by separating off the economic, political and religious aspects of its functioning. This reveals all the blood relationships and relationships through marriage which act as a means of expression of social life, and are the terms of the symbolic language of kinship. Kinship here, then, is one of the contents of social life and also serves as a mode of appearance and expression of all other contents. But in thus trying to restore some content to kinship Schneider runs a grave risk of falling into the very biologism which he condemns in Gellner. It is well known that the complex of blood relationships and relationships through marriage is not kinship, since a system of kinship is always a particular group of these relationships within which social rules are set up governing descent and marriage, and it is because only certain relationships are selected and retained as important that real kinship is not a biological but a social fact.

The mistake which both Beatty and Schneider make is to seek the content of this type of kinship outside the economic, political and religious relationships, since kinship is neither an external form nor a residual content but functions directly, internally as economic or political relationships, etc., and thus functions as a mode of expression of the social life and as a symbolic form of this life.

The scientific problem then is to determine why this should be the case in different types of society, and methodologically the only conclusion would seem to be that binary oppositions of concepts of the form-content type are inappropriate in trying to account for the functioning of the social structures. See Gellner, 'Ideal Language and Kinship Structure', *Philosophy of Science*, vol. xxiv (1957); Needham, 'Descent Systems and Ideal Language', *Ibid.*, vol. xxvii (1960); Gellner, 'The Concept of Kinship', *Ibid.*, vol. xxvii (1960); Barnes, 'Physical and Social Kinship', *Ibid.*, vol. xxviii (1961); Gellner, 'Nature and Society in Social Anthropology', *Ibid.*, vol. xxx (1963); Schneider, 'The Nature of Kinship', *American Anthropologist*, vol. 66, Nov.-Dec., 1964.

32. On this point, see Lévi-Strauss: 'The situation is quite different in groups where the satisfaction of economic needs depends entirely on the conjugal partnership and on the division of labour between the sexes. Not only do men and women have different technical specializations and are thus mutually dependent for the manufacture of the essential objects of everyday life, they also specialize in the production of different types of food. A complete and, above all, a regular diet therefore really depends on the couple operating as a co-operative for production, especially at the more primitive levels where very hard physical surroundings combined with a rudimentary degree of technical development will make life precarious, whether based on hunting, horticulture or simply the gathering of food in the wild. It would be almost impossible for an individual to survive if left abandoned to his own devices.' (*Structures élémentaires*, p. 48.)

33. Writing about the rank and importance of social structures in a society with a particular type of production, Marx says in the introduction to the *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*: 'It is like a sort of background lighting against which the colours appear and by which their individual tints are altered. It is like a particular type of atmosphere which determines the specific gravity of everything which exists in it' (p. 171).

34. Cf. Roland Barthes, 'Les Sciences humaines et l'œuvre de Lévi-Strauss', *Annales* (Nov.-Dec., 1964), p. 1086.

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### THE STRUCTURAL BALANCE OF THE KINSHIP SYSTEMS OF SOME PRIMITIVE PEOPLES

1. C. Lévi-Strauss, *Anthropologie structurale* (Plon, Paris, 1958); Eng. tr. by Jakobson and Schoepf, *Structural Anthropology* (Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1968).
2. P. Abell, 'Structural Balance in Dynamic Structures', *Sociology*, vol. 2 (1968).
3. F. Harary, 'On the Measurement of Structural Latence', *Behav. Sci.*, vol. 4 (1959).
4. See Abell, *op. cit.*
5. For a proof of this theorem see Harary, *op. cit.* This theorem is a special case of a more general theorem, a proof of which can be found in Abell, *op. cit.*
6. B. Malinowski, *The Sexual Life of Savages in North-Western Melanesia* (London, 1929).
7. Dubois de Minpèreux, cited in M. Kivalevski, 'La Famille matriarcale au Caucase', *L'Anthropologie*, vol. iv (1893).
8. E. N. Gifford, 'Tonga Society', *Bernice P. Bishop Bulletin*, no. 61 (Honolulu, 1929).
9. F. E. Williams, 'Group Sentiment and Primitive Justice', *American Anthropologist*, A.S., vol. xiii, no. 4, pt. 1 (1941).
10. F. E. Williams, 'Natives of Lake Kubuta, Papua', *Oceania*, vol. xi (1940-1).
11. D. L. Oliver, *A Solomon Island Society: Kinship and Leadership among the Sinai of Bougainville* (Camb. Mass., 1955).
12. A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, 'The Mother's Brother in South Africa', *South African Journal of Science*, vol. xxi (1924).
13. The reader might suggest that we should have included these from the beginning, especially the mother/son relationship. I agree, but I am trying to follow Lévi-Strauss, who was concerned with the four relationships so far dealt with. In terms of balance theory this prediction might equally have been carried out the other way round. For instance, if mother/son is positive and mother/husband negative, then father/son must be negative.

### ON THE MEANING OF THE WORD 'STRUCTURE' IN MATHEMATICS

1. See, for example: J. Piaget, *Traité de Logique* (P.U.F., Paris, 1949).
2. See R. Jaulin, 'La Géomancie; Essai d'analyse formelle' (to appear in *Cahiers de l'Homme*).

### SOME PROBLEMS IN THE THEORY OF STRUCTURAL BALANCE

1. We shall see later in the paper that Balance Theory must be carefully circumscribed by a *ceteris paribus* clause.
2. J. Galtung, 'Rank and Social Integration: A Multidimensional Approach', in *Sociological Theories in Progress*, ed. Berger, Zelditch and Anderson (Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1966).
3. L. Coser, *The Functions of Social Conflict* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1956).
4. P. Abell, 'Towards a Theory of Polarization' (mimeo), University of Essex (1968).
5. K. Lewin, *Topological Psychology* (McGraw-Hill, New York, 1936).
6. P. Abell, 'Towards a Model of Social Role' (mimeo), University of Essex (1968).
7. F. Harary, 'On the Measurement of Structural Balance', *Behavioral Science*, vol. 4 (1959).
8. F. Heider, 'Attitudes and Cognitive Organisation', *Journal of Psychology*, vol. 21 (1946).
9. This argument is complicated if we view the affective links in a structure as institutionalized. Then the problem reduces to one of whether or not a role incumbent cognizes 'correctly' the relationship between his role and other related roles. If he does not do so, then in some sense he is imperfectly socialized into his role. We shall, in this paper, however, ignore the problems of institutionalization of affective links.